

The last Speech, Confession, and dying Words of ROBERT THOMPSON,

Who was executed on the Sands at CARLISLE, on Saturday the 17th Day of September, 1791, for stealing a Mare, the property of John Tucker, of Earlsdon, in the County of Northumberland.

I ROBERT THOMPSON, aged 54 years, was born at Rothbury, in the parish of Rothbury, in the County of Northumberland, of poor but honest parents, who bestowed on me a liberal education, and brought me up in the fear of God. Growing in years I grew in vice, and strayed from the paths of virtue and grace. I became acquainted with a woman whom I married, after which I gave her a very indifferent life, for I gave myself up to every disorderly and wicked practice, frequenting the company of lewd women and profaning the Sabbath day. I fell in with a woman at Newcastle upon Tyne, that put me to many troubles in life to my great grief. I began selling of mint waters, with which I made it my study to defraud not only the County of Northumberland, but England in general. I have made it my study to write many sheets of paper to deceive the public, but a Righteous Judge, the law, and true witnesses coming against me, has put a stop to the unjust actions I meant to have carried on. This day it makes me shudder to think that I should have led a life of such detestable practices. To my shame I may say, that I have been a very wicked liver, for I think that I have been guilty of all sorts of crimes, the nature of which are as follow, viz.

I first began to steal coals from Shoswood coal-hill, which I made a practice of for some time unknown, and carried them upon asses, and sold them in Tweedmouth, nigh Berwick; and then from that I went to Hornclough, nigh Berwick upon Tweed, and took from —— Alder, Esq. five Socks and five Coulters, and carried them to my dwelling-house, at that time in Tweedmouth; but a reward of five guineas being offered for informing on the offender, I then thought proper to carry them back to Hornclough, where I took them from, and cast them into the river of Tweed, so as I thought the Gentleman would get them again, and that he might suspect some people in the neighbourhood. I declare, as a dying man, I committed this crime in company with a man known by the name of Hunting Joe, residing in Tweedmouth, nigh Berwick upon Tweed. And, at another time I went on pretence of selling mint waters to the said —— Alder's house at Hornclough, and stole two silver spoons, and sold them, I think, for 15s. to one Mr Clarke, who dealt in that line in the town of Berwick. At another time, the said Hunting Joe and me, went to Mr Alder's, and stole two sheep; and again, in company with the said Hunting Joe, we stole two sheep from John Anderson, in Middle Ord, nigh Berwick; but after we had slaughtered them, we could get no opportunity to carry them away; but the night following, we went to the place where we had them concealed, but they had been carried off; I had a strong suspicion of my comrade being the person who had removed the two carcases, for which reason I dropped having any more correspondence with him.

After that I joined the company of one Dryden, a besom maker, and along with him went up Tweed, and made it our nightly practice to steal salmon fish from the fishermen, and sold them in Berwick. From this, in company with Dryden, and one Fenwick, we went to Eyemouth, and broke into the salt-warehouse of Mrs Atchison, and stole therefrom, a great quantity of salt, and carried it in a boat round to Berwick, and sold the same to the Coopers of the said place. After that, along with one Thomas Jeffery, I went to Thomas Steels in Norham moor, and stole two saddles, and went to Hornclough, and stole a horse from John Richardson, and went with him to Musselburgh, and there sold him for twelve guineas. In the course of three months after, John Richardson got information of his horse being sold there; and a little after, Thomas Jeffery was taken up, and carried before Esquire Ord, at Longridge; as John Richardson got his horse, and Jeffery's friends made up the money, and it was passed over.

After all this, I took up with one Clarke, a besom maker, and in company with him, stole three jack ass's from Spital Moor, and drove them to Wooler, and sold them to a man who goes under the name of the Rabbit, in Dorrington, for fifteen shillings each. From this I went to Lady Erol, at Etal, in Northumberland, on pretence of selling mint-waters; to see what my eye could see, on coming from the house I spied two milk asses, and drove them to Norham, and sold one of them to one Mary Marthall, who lodges travelling people, the other I carried to Hornclough and sold it to William Dun, a blind fiddler. After that I went into the Marsh of Scotland, near to Dunces, where I met with one Jean Govan, who told me she had been at Dunces buying butter, so I walked with her about a mile, and being scarce of money, I stopped her, and took from her all the butter, besides, about ten shillings in silver, and sold the butter to a brewer in Clock Mill for eleven shillings. From thence I went to Allen Bank, and broke into the mill of Robert Young, in that place, and took a large quantity of flour and pearl barley, and carried the same to Berwick, which I sold to one Lochead, an inn-keeper there. After that, the said Clarke and me went to Lamberton and stole four sheep, and I carried them home to my wife and family. As I could not live any longer in Tweedmouth upon account of my infamous character, I accordingly went to Morpeth, where I took a house, and in about three months I sent for my family, and having purchased four asses, I began to carry coals into Morpeth, of which I made a considerable living for some time; but not liking to work I thought I would go to Newcastle, which I did, and fell to the distilling mint-waters again; being in company with a clock maker in Morpeth, he said to me, if I would learn him to distil mint waters, he would learn me to coin money.

Immediately he fell to work and coloured three halfpence, and gave me them to pass for shillings; he then brought a constable, and seized me for making bad money, and carried me before a Justice, who committed me to gaol: when I was tried at the following assizes, I received sentence of death, and under that sentence I lay one year, but got his Majesty's pardon; my character being then known at Morpeth, after I got clear, I set off for the South of England, but went no farther than into Yorkshire; and in Hull went into the shop of John Addison, and took therefrom a quantity of silk handkerchiefs, and went and sold them in the country. On my way back to Hull, I slept one night at Beverley along with a man unknown; I took from his pocket, in the morning, two half guineas, five shillings, and fourpence of copper, being the whole in his pocket: as I went away early in the morning I was not discovered; but as I was within one mile of Hull, two men came riding up to me and seized me as their prisoner, and took me back to Beverley, and being afraid of being committed to gaol I made up the affair with the man, and gave him the money again, and paid those men for their trouble. After this I went to Hull, where I continued some time.

My two sons, Thomas and George, being one time quite destitute of money, I fell on a method to raise a little, and for that purpose we went to Durham to a recruiting party of the 44th regiment, where I received half-a-guinea for the bringing of George, but Thomas was refused being too young: George received three guineas of bounty money, with which we all set off together, and defaced our King and country, which I do sorely repeat this day.

After leaving Durham, we went into Northumberland, my son Thomas and me, and there him and I went to Darras Hall, in the parish of Ponteland, eight or nine miles from Newcastle, and did steal a bay horse, the property of Nathaniel Clarke, of Darras Hall aforesaid, and carried him to Longtown, and sold him for eight pounds. And then went into Northumberland and stole two saddles, and carried them to Brampton, and there I lay waiting at night until my son Thomas brought two horses to me, and him and me went to Lancaster, and sold the two above horses for fifteen pounds sterling per piece. And from that I came to Hawick, and fell in with one one J—— T——, and I and him went to Mr Brown's, in the Marsh of Scotland, and stole three bullocks, and sold them in Dunces to one Mr Taylor, a Butcher; and then we went to Greenlaw, and sleeping in the house of Mrs Buchan, in the above place, and in the morning drinking in company with a man, who we understood that he had several pounds of money upon him, we thought to make him drunk, and then we thought to take his money which we accomplished, but staying over long, the said man being refreshed from the effects of liquors again, he missed his money, and laid it to our charge, and called for a constable, which immediately came, and we being searched, the purse was found upon my comrade, on which we were immediately committed to gaol for a further hearing; therefore my two sons came there in the course of a week, and went to Stich Hill, near Kelso, and made up the affair with the man, and the Sheriff came to Greenlaw the affair being made up, and none to appear against us, we were discharged out of the county; we immediately took the coach at Greenlaw, and went to Edinburgh, and there J—— T—— and I broke a carrier's waggon, and stole a large quantity of cloth, and sold a part of it to a Michael Henderson, in the Grafts-market; we went from there to Dalkeith, where we stayed about nine weeks, and spent the most part of what money we had in the house of James Gibb, Innkeeper there; and from that we went to Kelso, and broke the shop of Mrs Fraser, and took a large quantity of ribbons, and a large assortment of broad cloth, and went from Greenlaw to Newcastle, by Mr Howey's waggon, and we went to the house of Joseph Gibbins, in Milfield, and stayed there two days in order to let the aforesaid cloth be arrived at Newcastle.

And on my road to Newcastle as I was going past Wooler I espied a large washing of clothes, and a thought came into my head that I would have them, I returned back to Wooler, and stayed at the Black-bull of the above place until night came on, I then set off for them and compleated my design; I therefore went on that night up to a fell west of Wooler and dried them next day, and at night I came down to Wooler and sold them to one Thompson a clogger in the above place for four pounds. I then set off to Newcastle in order to sell the cloth that was sent by Howie's waggon, but when I came there I found myself disappointed of it, for by some means Mr Howie's clerk had been informed that it belonged to Mr Jordan, in Edinburgh, which caused it to be stopped. I then thought there was no fear of getting it, but upon a public advertisement appeared to be the property of Mrs Fraser, in Kelso, so then I was entirely disappointed.

The crime which I am to suffer for, I will relate as follows. My son Thomas and George Bolton came and told me that they had been taking notice of some very good horses on Killingworth moor, and asked me if I would go with them, and they would take each of them one, to which I agreed, but I made an observation to my son and Bolton that we had got no saddles, to which Bolton and my son said they knew where they could get saddles so we did not take the horses that night, but on the night following George Bolton and my son Thomas went to a gentleman's stable in Northumberland, and broke open the stable, and stole from thence three saddles and carried them forward on the road that we meant to come with the horses where we concealed them about three miles on the road to Carlisle, where we left them for three nights after, and on the fourth night following, George Bolton and my son Thomas came to me and said if I would go forward to the place where the saddles were concealed and have them ready, they would go and bring the black mare and the two galloways, to which I agreed.

I went away to get them ready, and they went and accordingly in a short time came with the mare and the two galloways, so Bolton put one saddle on one of the galloways, and my son put another saddle on the other galloway, and I put the third saddle on the black mare, so we all mounted, and rode away on our road towards Carlisle, to dispose of them, as we well knew how to dispose of them before they were staled, as a Horse-dealer nigh Carlisle had often bought before horses from George Bolton and my son Thomas; so we continued on our journey to Chollerford Bridge, where, according to appointment, we met with the said Horse-dealer, as I had wrote to him on that business to meet us there; so he said to us that he knew not what to do to pay us, for we had brought a greater stock and better cattle than he expected; so he said we must go to Carlisle with him, and he would pay for them all according to our bargain; so I asked the said Horse-dealer if he would take the horses to Carlisle himself, but he said he would not, by reason they all had saddles on, and his neighbours would take notice of them; but he said that we might take them to an Innkeeper's house near Carlisle, and there he would pay us according to the bargain, so he went away, and in a short time we all followed on the same road; and we came to the house appointed, where he was, and we agreed that he shold pay us £31. but when the bargain was made, he had but eight guineas; he said he would pay us the remainder in a month's time, to which I objected, and said it was hard to run our lives in danger for the benefit of others; to which he said, that his life was in as great danger as ours, for if should be found with him he should be brought into the snare for the whole. So I and my son and Bolton went out and consulted with each other, and I thought that if we should not let him have them he might make a discovery of them, and all former affairs, which we thought might put a stop to our future intentions; we went into the house again, and agreed that he shold have them, so to my great misfortune he paid me the money for which I am now to suffer.

It grieves me to think that when I was in the cell along with John Fearon under the same sentence, who put an end to his life, by hanging himself in his garters, I knew of it, but was so unhappy in my own situation that I had a great mind of committing the same crime myself. I have still reason to regret at my own wicked heart, for when I saw him hanging, the handkerchief he wore round his neck he had put into his pocket, I stole it out and utterly denied seeing it, so I gave it to my wife the first time I saw her.

*EB15.T3774.791-c

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G. & J. WALL,

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